THE ASIAN AGE

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Blaze in Mumbai pub kills 14

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, DEC. 29

Fourteen people, including 11 women, were killed and 13 injured when a fire broke out in a commercial building at Kamala Mill Compound in Mumbai's Lower Parel on Thursday night.

According to fire officials, the fire first broke out at the roof of pub-cum-restaurant 1Above on the fifth floor at 12.30 am and then spread rapidly to an adjoining eatery — Mojo's Bistro. Fire vehicles reached the spot within 10 minutes but it took the firemen around three hours to bring the blaze under control. All 14 victims died due to asphyxiation. The injured were admitted to various hospitals. A seriously injured victim was taken to the National Burn Centre in Airoli.

If BMC officials are found guilty in issuing permissions to hotels without checking all the conditions, then criminal action will be taken against them: Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis

Khushbu Bansali, who was celebrating her 29th birthday at 1Above, was among those killed.

As the fire erupted, there was panic among people, who were partying at the two eateries. In an attempt to save themselves, most tried to take shelter in a washroom at 1Above. But the decision proved fatal as they were trapped inside and died due to suffocation, said an eyewitness.

Unconfirmed reports suggested that the lone exit shared by three restaurants, including London Taxi Gastrobar, was locked when the fire broke out.

The blaze also spread to the next building, which houses the offices of Times Network, including Times Now, Mirror Now, ET Now and Zoom TV and TV9 Marathi. The TV channels went off-air as their transmission dishes were affected.

Though fire officials said the cause of the fire was unknown, a short circuit at 1Above is being suspected as the cause for the blaze. Fire officials said the fire fighting system of the entire building was not working.

"The fire system was dysfunctional. We had issued fire NoC to 1Above, while that of Mojo's Brito has to be ascertained. But we found hookah accessories in 1Above, which is illegal. The top portion of the rooftop of both restaurants was also covered illegally. There were encroachments in the staircases leading to the top floor. We also found gas cylinders during our fire fighting exercise," said Kailash Hivrale, deputy chief fire officer of Mumbai Fire Brigade.

Taking a serious note of this, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has suspended five officials of G-South ward for negligence and has also transferred assistant commissioner Prashant Sapkale with immediate

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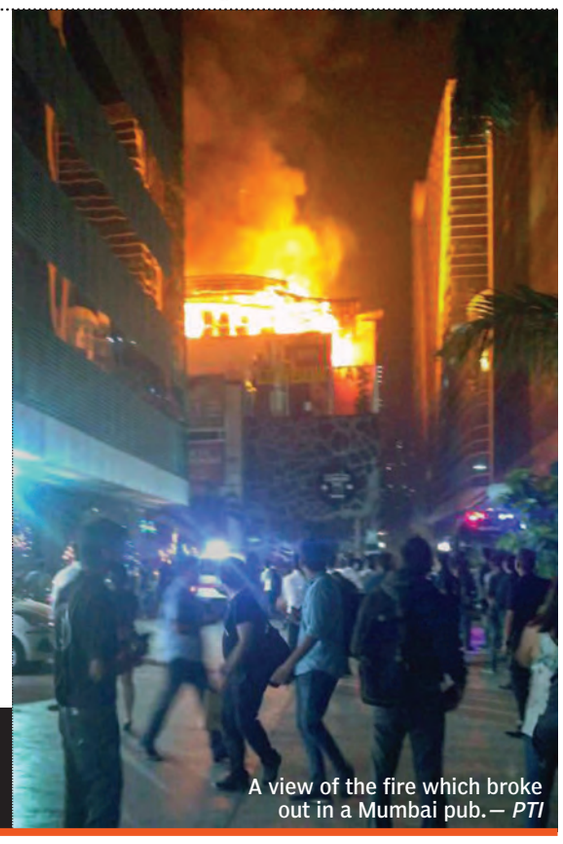
TOWERING INFERNO

A b'day bash at Mumbai's 1Above pub ended in a tragedy as 14 people were killed in a blaze shortly after midnight on Thursday. Most victims died of suffocation in the fire sparked by a suspected short circuit or a hookah before spreading to the adjacent restaurant.

- The lone emergency exit shared by three restaurants, including Mojo's Bistro and London Taxi Gastrobar, was locked when the incident occurred
- The restaurants were on the fifth floor of Trade House Building in Kamala Mills compound that is a popular nightlife destination
- Khushbu Bhansali, celebrating her 29th birthday, was among those killed
- The pub 1Above allegedly did not follow fire safety norms
- The blaze spread fast as the pub roof was made of bamboo with tarpaulin sheets
- Cops booked Ritesh Sanghvi, Jigar Sanghvi and Abhijeet Mankar of C Grade Hospitality, the company which manages the pub; 5 BMC men suspended for negligence

Jayant Lalani, father of Dhairya and Vishwa, mourns their death in the pub fire. — *AFP*



A view of the fire which broke out in a Mumbai pub. — *PTI*

> People were running over me even as the ceiling above me was collapsing in flames
> — **Sulbha Arora,** a survivor

FIRE IN NEW YORK APARTMENT KILLS 12, INCLUDING 4 KIDS

New York, Dec. 29: A three-year-old boy playing with stove burners accidentally ignited the fire that ripped through a New York apartment building, killing 12 people including four children, the city's fire department chief said Friday.

The fire broke out a little before 7 pm on Thursday on the first floor of a brick building and quickly spread upstairs, killing people on multiple floors, the New York City fire department said.

Children aged 1, 2 and 7 died along with four men and four women, local media reported. Authorities said firefighters rescued 12 people from the building. — *Agencies*

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5 Cong MLAs in Meghalaya quit legislature

To join BJP alliance party NPP

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 29

In a major setback for the ruling Congress Party in the frontier state of Meghalaya, five of their MLAs resigned their membership of the state Assembly to join National People's Party (NPP) just a few months before the state goes to polls. Three other MLAs, including one from UDP and two independents, also resigned from the state legislature to join NPP.

The NPP, led by Conrad K. Sangma, son of former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma, has two MLAs in Meghalaya at present. NPP is an alliance partner of the BJP in the Manipur government.

The five Congress MLAs who resigned on Friday had earlier rebelled against chief minister Mukul Sangma and the party leadership. Four of the five MLAs were part of the state Cabinet and were sacked by the chief minister on grounds of "incompetence".

The eight legislators who resigned their membership in the state Assembly included Siawbhalang Dhar (Nartiang), Comingone Ymbon (Raliang), Hopeful Bamon (Sutnga Saipung), Stephanson Mukhim (Amlarem), Prestone Tynsong (Pynursula), Remington Pyngrope (Mawkynriew), Rowell Lyngdoh (Mawkyrwat) and Ngaitlang Dhar (Umroi).

Veteran Congress

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ASSAM ALERT AHEAD OF CITIZEN LIST PUBLICATION

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

Intelligence agencies have asked the Assam government to remain on high alert as some "fringe elements and groups" could create trouble in the wake of publication of National Register of Citizens (NCR) on Dec. 31.

The home ministry, which is closely monitoring the situation, has already deployed 450 companies or 45,000 security personnel of central para-military forces in the State.

The NCR is contentious as it would only include names of bona fide citizens of the state, leaving out illegal migrants, particularly from Bangladesh.

The move to finalise the NRC gained momentum after the BJP came to power in Assam last year. Lllegal migration from Bangladesh was one if its main election issues.

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WINDOWS

A man takes part in a festival on Friday during which groups from northern Romanian villages are invited to sing winter carols and dance in the city of Vatra Dornei. — *AFP*

Free treatment for accident victims at all Delhi hospitals

New Delhi: Terming it as a "step in right direction", lieutenant-governor Anil Baijal on Friday approved the Delhi government's decision to provide free treatment for medico-legal victims of road accidents, acid attacks and burn injuries. The L-G also gave his concurrence to amendments to the Delhi Arogya Kosh scheme to provide financial assistance for certain specific high-end diagnostic (radiological) tests/surgeries.

Full report on Page 13

Triple talaq bill to face RS test Jan. 2

New Delhi: The triple talaq bill, which saw a relatively smooth passage in the Lok Sabha, will be tabled in the Rajya Sabha on January 2. The bill might run into trouble in the RS where the Congress and the BJP stare eyeball to eyeball with 57 members each.

Full report on Page 2

Indian shot dead by robbers in US

Washington: An Indian-origin student, Arshad Vhora, 19, was shot dead during an attempted armed robbery in the US on Thursday at the Clark gas station at 142nd and Langley in Dolton in Chicago, CBS News reported. — *PTI*

Full report on Page 10

COUNTERPOINT

Now ours is a zero-crime state, sir... we have withdrawn criminal cases against everyone!

WEATHER

Max: 23°C
Min: 7°C
RH: 60%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Dense fog

ASTROGUIDE

Hemalaba: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Pushya Shuddha Dwadasi till 6.50 pm
Star: Krittika till 8.33 pm
Varjyam: 9.42 am to 11.09 am
Durmuhurtam: 6.49 am to 8.17 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

SUNSET TODAY 5.34 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.13 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.09 PM
MOONSET TODAY 3.47 AM

HP Congress MLA slaps woman cop, gets 2 back

Shimla, Dec. 29: Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA Asha Kumari's VIP tantrum back-fired when she slapped a woman constable on duty during party chief Rahul Gandhi's visit here, only to get two slaps in return. The ugly spat ended with the legislator apologising for assaulting the woman cop.

The incident took place when Ms Kumari got stuck in a massive crowd outside the venue of the meeting where Congress president was reviewing the grand old party's recent election loss.

She had an argument with a woman cop during which she slapped the latter, but the uniformed constable immediately replied in kind. The spat was captured on video and uploaded on social media. — *PTI*

Govt admits economy slowed down in '16-17

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

The Indian economy slowed down in 2016-17, with the gross domestic product (GDP) declining drastically from 8 per cent in 2015-16 to 7.1 per cent, the government said on Friday, but added that the graph will soon be on an upward swing.

Finance minister Arun Jaitley said slower economic growth reflected lower growth in the industry and the services sectors due to structural, external, fiscal and monetary factors.

Replying to a question in Lok Sabha, Mr Jaitley said that for the last three consecutive years, India has remained the fastest growing economy in the world.

He made the assertion after TMC MP Saugata Roy said that the country's growth rate had plummeted to an all-time low of 5.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2017-18.

The finance minister said that Mr Roy's phraseology was somewhat exaggerated.

Even the IMF and the World Bank have said that India will be the second fastest growing economy, he pointed out. Therefore, to exaggerate and say that we have hit the bottom and that a "rot" has set in is somewhat not correct, Mr Jaitley added.

Mr Roy, however, clarified that he used the word "rut" not "rot", to which

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> **All indications seem to suggest that in the coming quarters the curve is going to be on an upward swing**
> — **Arun Jaitley,** *Finance minister*

Beware of Bitcoin, it's like a ponzi scheme: Govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 29

In a strongly worded warning against investing in virtual currencies like Bitcoin, the government on Friday said these currencies were like "ponzi schemes" and there was a "real" risk of people "losing their hard-earned money".

"Virtual currencies (VCs) are not backed by government fiat. These are also not legal tender. Hence, virtual currencies are not currencies. These are also being described as 'coins'. There is however no physical attribute to these coins," said a statement by the finance ministry. It underlined that "virtual currencies" are neither currencies nor coins, they have

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Anand wins Rapid Chess title after 14 yrs

Chennai, Dec. 29: Indian Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand has reclaimed the World Rapid Chess Championship title after beating Russia's Vladimir Fedoseev in the tie-break play-off in Riyadh late Thursday. Anand, 48, last won this title in 2003.

Relieved at claiming his first Rapid World title after 14 years, Anand said he had entered the tournament in a "pessimistic" frame of mind but managed to surprise himself and the world with an unbeaten campaign.

"The last two rapid events were nothing short of disastrous. I came here in a pessimistic frame of mind. But it has just been the most wonderful surprise... I played well," Anand said after his triumph. Anand, a former world champion who had been drawing flak from critics for a string of subpar performances, hit back in style. He outclassed World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen in the ninth round, a win he described as a key moment in the tournament. Anand then defeated Fedoseev 2-0 in a two-game tie-break after a three-way tie with the Russian and Ian Nepomniachtchi at 10.5 points each from a possible 15.

Chess genius and old rival Garry Kasparov heaped praise on Anand, saying that the 48-year-old should use his win to remind his critics that he still has plenty to offer his younger rivals on the chess circuit. — *Agencies*

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Viswanathan Anand

> Congratulations to the man from the sixties on his World Rapid title! I hope you dedicated this latest victory to everyone who has asked you when you were going to retire!
> — **Garry Kasparov**

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